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Letter dated 14 November 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Bahrain to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

With reference to the high-level meeting on the culture of peace, held under agenda item 45 of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly on 12 and 13 November 2008, I have the honour to transmit the text of the statement of H.M. King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, King of the Kingdom of Bahrain, who attended the meeting but, due to unforeseen circumstances, was unable to deliver it to the General Assembly (see annex). The statement was distributed to the participants during the meeting.

I would very much appreciate it if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 45.

(*Signed*) Tawfeeq Ahmed **Almansoor**
Ambassador
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Annex to the letter dated 14 November 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Bahrain to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Arabic]

Statement by His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the high-level meeting on dialogue among religions and cultures, New York, 12-13 November 2008

At the outset, I should like to extend my thanks and appreciation to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for his diligence in extending invitations to attend the launching of his high-minded initiative, through the highest international forum, to strengthen the language of dialogue and understanding between religions and cultures. That initiative is in keeping with support for the principles of mutual respect and the attainment of peace and security for all humanity. Its positive results and impact make it one of the most important of global initiatives.

We also take this opportunity to thank His Excellency Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, President of the sixty-third session of the United Nations General Assembly, for having sponsored the convening of this important meeting and commend his efforts to establish the values of justice among the peoples of the world and to implant the concepts of solidarity, equity and transparency in international relations with the assistance of the members of the international community and with the support of the Secretary-General of the United Nations who plays a conspicuous role in the attainment of the aims and objectives of the United Nations Charter.

This meeting today of the international family is being held to give effect to what was agreed upon at the World Conference on Interfaith Dialogue, held in Madrid in July 2008 at the kind initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, at which the participants called for a special session of the United Nations General Assembly on interfaith dialogue.

The Kingdom of Bahrain supports the Madrid Declaration which affirmed the unity of humankind, equality between people regardless of colour, race or culture, respect for diversity among cultures and civilizations and between the followers of the divine religions while taking full account of the particularities of peoples and considering terrorism to be a worldwide phenomenon requiring a united stand in order to address its causes and effects, and at the same time agreeing on its definition and meaning.

The historical and philosophical roots of human rights are enshrined in our various religions, civilizations and cultures. Over fourteen centuries ago, Islam took up the cause of defending human rights, bearing witness to the honour bestowed by God on His creation by promoting His sublime message throughout the world, regardless of culture, creed or colour. The Almighty has said: "We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of our creation" (*The Holy Koran, XVII:70*).

Since the advent of Islam, it has extended the hand of positive friendship to all civilizations that guarantee continuing dialogue, openness and human

acquaintanceship within a system of ethical values in which all laws and creeds agree; all are seeking a common mechanism to achieve peaceful coexistence through mutual understanding and respect built on shared trust between all human communities.

The diversity of religions and creeds should be a source of dialogue to fortify humanity against the disputes and controversies which widen the chasm between peoples; religions should not be thrust into the tragedies that have affected humankind in past ages and it should be recognized that the real reason for those tragedies is the absence of dialogue leading to extremism which has been espoused by a minority of followers of religions who imagine they are thereby performing a religious duty and that religion exonerates them. Similarly, mankind's departure from the values and morals proclaimed by religions has led to the spread of wickedness and the increase of criminality, the taking of drugs and the growth of terrorism which acknowledges no religion, creed or country.

Although there is an inherent and essential connection between human rights and cultural diversity on the one hand and the singleness of human destiny on the other, those rights are in many cases impaired by certain narrow views, aspirations and interests and, instead of affirming and strengthening equality and brotherhood among people, they foment hatred, racism and division — including what has been termed Islamophobia — phenomena which are promoted by a minority in certain circles in order to stir up discord and hatred between peoples and to attain narrow political ends designed to bring about conflict between civilizations in disregard of the tolerance and teachings of Islam which rejects violence and calls for peace, security, justice, mercy and brotherhood between all people. The Almighty has said: "O mankind, We have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes, that you may know one another" (*The Holy Koran, XLIX:13*).

Over the centuries, the Kingdom of Bahrain has been and still remains a fertile land where all religions coexist by virtue of the respect for human rights enshrined in its laws. The followers of different religions in the Kingdom enjoy full freedom to perform their religious observances and build their places of worship. There are fourteen churches and synagogues in the Kingdom as well as places of worship for other creeds. All of their followers, whether Bahraini citizens or visitors, enjoy all the rights conferred on them by the State and this coexistence of religions and denominations enhances the pride of Bahrainis in their multifaceted and open culture based on supreme Islamic values.

There is no doubt that the followers of these religions have made an effective contribution over the ages to the progress and development of the Kingdom of Bahrain. By the grace of God, everyone has lived in an atmosphere of brotherhood characterized by affection and friendship that has made our Kingdom a model of coexistence within a unique cultural and intellectual diversity.

As a result of the desire of the Kingdom of Bahrain to affirm its support for the progress of dialogue among religions, it has hosted many conferences and forums attended by major scholars, prominent theologians and thinkers of different religions. In 2002 Bahrain hosted the Islamic-Christian Dialogue Conference and in January 2008 it organized a Forum for Dialogue among Civilizations as well as exchange visits by scholars, preachers and theologians between countries of the East and the West in order to revitalize the principle of dialogue between religions and civilizations.

The United Nations Charter calls for the strengthening of international relations and for the establishment of a secure human society and in the Declaration of Principles of 1994 the General Assembly called for tolerance and for the spread of the culture of peace, and declared the Year for Tolerance in 1995 and the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations in 2001. We reaffirm that the United Nations is committed to its efforts to reinforce peace among nations and to find a common denominator in order to bring peoples together. In that context, the Kingdom of Bahrain supports all United Nations initiatives aimed at establishing common ground between religions in order to give prominence to agreed religious and ethical values which contribute to the building and consolidation of human civilization, which allow it to grow and prosper and which enshrine the values of justice, equality and mutual respect to attain human security and happiness.

The Kingdom of Bahrain also supports all humanitarian projects aimed at promoting human happiness as well as the civilized visions designed to protect people and to ensure human security and stability.

The Kingdom of Bahrain considers the initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques calling for a dialogue of religions as a new vision to bring the peoples of the world with their different religions closer together. It can be seen as a practical tool to address, on the one hand, the phenomenon of extremism and hatred and, on the other, what can be termed groundless fears of Islam and Muslims. The initiative is a cultural framework in which the major strategic issues are interconnected and which provides a general climate to bring about the success of many of the international initiatives which offer bridges between religions in pursuit of our overriding goal which is for peace to prevail throughout the world and for humanity to be happy with its achievements.

We therefore propose the adoption of a universal declaration by the United Nations that would embrace the role of religions in establishing peace, justice and freedom in the world as called for by the participants in Madrid and in the other recent forums on this issue.

In this context, the Kingdom of Bahrain is keen to continue the dialogue and the historic initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and expresses its willingness to host a general secretariat for dialogue between religions and cultures to be based in Bahrain.

We have a profound belief in the ability of peoples to coexist in harmony, despite the diversity of their religions, creeds and cultures, by virtue of a distinctive system of ethical values contained in these laws and cultures which calls for the fostering of human rights and the attainment of human security and happiness. We trust that our current meeting will be a continuation of the World Conference on Interfaith Dialogue held in Madrid and an effective contribution to the efforts of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the United Nations and all the religious, intellectual and political leaders, and the international and regional organizations that support that initiative. The Kingdom of Bahrain reaffirms its determination to contribute effectively to that end by all means within its power with a view to attaining the desired goal, namely a world of amity dominated by justice which secures the peace, security and happiness of its peoples and societies.